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Groups Thank Governor for Taking Action to Stop Toxic Pollution Coalition Joins Locke in Calling on Legislature to Fund Toxics Phaseout Program

Olympia—Governor Locke signed an Executive Order today directing the Department of Ecology (Ecology) to fully implement the state's plan to phase out mercury pollution and start developing a new plan to phase out toxic flame retardants. Both directives are part of the state's policy to stop persistent toxic pollution (or PBTs). The action was applauded by members of the Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition, a broad based alliance of health, environmental and other groups working to prevent and cleanup persistent toxic pollution.

"We thank Governor Locke for taking these steps to protect human health and the environment," said Charles Weems, MD, and board member for Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility. "This makes Washington state a leader in protecting public health from toxic pollution."

The governor's executive order provides \$100,000 in emergency funding through June 30th for Ecology to continue implementing the state's mercury plan and start work on a plan to phase out toxic flame retardants. Recent studies show toxic flame retardants (polybrominated biphenyl ethers or PBDEs) are building up rapidly in the environment and women's breastmilk. PBDEs are chemical cousins of PCBs, the long banned chemical, and are in hundreds of products such as polyurethane foam, carpets, mattresses, plastics, and computers.

"There is growing concern that toxic flame retardants will be the PCBs or DDT of this generation. We are thrilled Governor Locke has recognized the urgency of the situation," said Ivy Sager-Rosenthal, Environmental Advocate for the Washington Public Interest Research Group (WashPIRG). "Now it is critical for the Legislature to back this action with adequate funds."

The Governor also challenged the state Legislature to support Ecology's program charged with phasing out persistent toxic chemicals by restoring the funding for the program eliminated in the 2003 state budget. Governor Locke has allocated \$436,000 in his budget for the program in 2005.

"There are significant increases in asthma, childhood learning disabilities and cancer that may very well be related to persistent toxic chemicals in our food, air water and soil," said Elise Miller, Executive Director for Institute for Children's Environmental Health. "We applaud Governor Locke for taking this essential action to help ensure a healthy future for current and future generations."

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The Executive Order also makes the state a leader in purchasing products that do not contribute to persistent toxic pollution and directs Ecology to incorporate the state policy into its programs.

"It is critical that large purchasers, like Washington state, are taking steps to create markets for cleaner products that don't leave us with poisons in our bodies," said Paul Bogart of the Healthy Building Network. "From building materials to office supplies, cost-effective alternatives exist that do not contribute to a toxic legacy."

Restoring the funding for the state persistent toxics program is a top legislative priority for the Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition and the environmental community.

On Thursday, January 29th, at 8 a.m., the House Fisheries, Parks and Ecology Committee will hold a work session on toxic flame retardants (PBDEs) and breast milk in the John L. O'Brien Building, Hearing Room A.

The Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition is a broad-based alliance working to phase out persistent toxic chemicals and create a healthy future. Members include over forty public health, civic and environmental organizations, including the American Lung Association of Washington, Breast Cancer Fund, Institute of Neurotoxicology and Neurological Disorders, Washington Conservation Voters, People for Puget Sound, WashPIRG, Institute for Children's Environmental Health, Healthy Building Network, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Organizations, Planned Parenthood Affiliates of Western Washington, Washington Association of Churches, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility, and the Washington Toxics Coalition.

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